

Tom Marrinson

EDGEWATER GALLERY AT THE FALLS, MIDDLEBURY

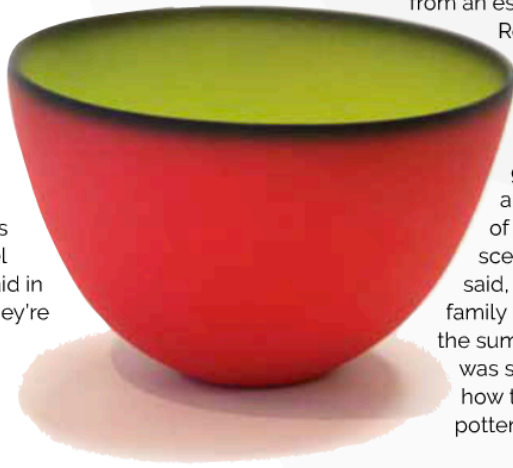
The bowl has been the staple of ceramics since ancient people first began firing clay. The form came from necessity; it is a vessel to contain, to cook, to hold. Then came embellishment in texture, color and pattern. Tom Marrinson's bowls are so far evolved as to be free

BY ISABEL
LOWER

from the constraints of functionality: the porcelain is thrown to near paper-thin edges, each piece weighing only ounces. But they are most astounding — and most vulnerable — from the glaze that Marrinson airbrushes on. Glowing colors are left matte, rather than finished with a clear glaze. This way they absorb the light that strikes rather than reflect it, and the result is luminous.

"It's a classic form, it's a beautiful form, and the thing I think that most people are attracted to is that when they're lit, and you look at them, they take on this bottomless sort of feel to them," Marrinson said in a recent interview. "They're contemplative."

The 53-year-old recalls giving one of his bowls as a gift



to a friend, but, he said, "I went back to visit her a few weeks later and she had put pens, and coins and all that kind of stuff in it, which had completely destroyed the inside. And she explained, 'It's a bowl! I can't not use a bowl!'"

Marrinson has come to terms with this reaction, and now says, "Once it's out of my hands, they can do what they want with it."

Unusual for an artist, this could be described as a healthy detachment from his delicate creations once he's let them go into the world. "People ask, can I put potpourri in it? And I say, well anything that you put in them will mess up that surface, and then you also will lose that glowing, bottomless feel that they have."

In the tradition of old masters, Marrinson inherited the practice behind these bowls from an established artist. Emily Rossheim, of Starksboro, perfected the technique and created a successful business, showing her work at galleries across the U.S. and becoming a staple of Vermont's ceramic arts scene. They met, Marrinson said, soon after he and his family moved to Hinesburg in the summer of 2000. Marrinson was still trying to figure out how to make a living as a potter here.



Tom Marrinson at work creating a ceramic bowl.

"In the meantime," he said, "I had met Emily through some other friends, and really liked her work, and at one point she approached me and said, 'Can I come by your studio, I want to talk about business with you.'"

As it turned out, she was looking for someone to help her in her work.

"We decided to find out if we would be compatible to work together and we got along well, had similar aesthetics, so we started working together," Marrinson explained, guessing they partnered sometime around 2006. "We were partners for several years."

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But after the physical labor that ceramics entails became too much for 60-something-year-old Rossheim, she was ready to retire from ceramics and indicated that she wanted to pass the business on to Marrinson.

"I remember asking her one day, How would this work? At some point, would you name a price and I would buy the business from you? And she said 'No, I don't really see it that way. I think if you really wanted to take it over, I'll just hand it over to you.'"

"That was a really unusual thing," Marrinson acknowledged, "She had had so many people along the way that helped her make a business, she said I just feel like I want to help somebody else and pass it on."

Before he partnered with Rossheim, Marrinson was doing "mainly sculptural work. A lot of wall pieces, which I'm now playing around with a little bit. Trying to come up with some new ideas that might relate to the bowls, but they were sort of these individual pods, these little forms that would hang in series on a wall."

Marrinson got his undergraduate and MFA at University of Tulsa, near where he grew up in Oklahoma. Originally, he'd wanted to be a painter, which was inspired by his high



Tom Marrinson has been creating ceramic bowls with Emily Rossheim for about 10 years. Marrinson took over the business in 2015.

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school art teacher.

"He was sort of this rogue teacher," Marrinson began, "I'd always heard of as if he were kind of dangerous, like, 'Are you taking a class with Rutledge?' I finally figured out how to get out of this more traditional art class into this more 'dangerous' art class, and I credit him with continuing to do what I do now. He would really get us to do a lot of new things that we weren't used to, and take his weekends to load up his truck with all of our work and we'd go with him to all of these shows he'd entered us in. He just created such an excitement around it that I ended up getting a partial scholarship to the University."

As part of his art degree requirements, Marrinson had to take Ceramics One and Two. The first he hated, but "Ceramics Two was a throwing class, and it happened when I took that class the people that were in it were into clay. We had a lot of fun, so it was not just the material but it happened to be the people who I was in the class with that were really interesting to me. So I changed from a painting major to ceramics."

Marrinson's story speaks to how artists are a part of a community, spurring each other — and often the next generation — on to learn technique and then expand. Marrinson says he is continuing Rossheim's work, "But I've been little by little playing around with adding some new things. Like the new white rimmed bowls, and some more individual sculptural pieces."

Edgewater Gallery on the Green is now displaying Marrinson's new white rimmed bowls, a subtle design change, which coupled with bright new colors, transforms the age-old form yet again.

— Elsie Lynn Parini contributed to this story.